

FESTIVAL OF FRIENDS HITS BIG TIME

BY LARRY MILLER
SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER

The Festival of Friends, Hamilton's iconic free concert weekend has come out with a line-up that is best described as Baby Boomers meet Gen X. And like those generations, the Festival of Friends is experiencing growing pains. First, a little bit about the music, then a little bit about the growth.

The Friday Boomer line-up includes folk singer Richie Havens (who can honestly say he was at Woodstock), Cajun legend Buckwheat Zydeco (three-chili-pepper hot off a Grammy), and blues/jazz/rock icon Dr. John. That's a lot of star power for one night. "Any one of these artists could easily have been the headliner," says festival director Loren Lieberman. "This festival has grown so much in the past few years that we're now capable having three headliners on one night."

Ditto for the Sunday Gen X line-up. It's a veritable British re-invasion with Goth pioneer Peter Murphy of Bauhaus fame, and the undeniably quirky Squeeze. Before writing this piece I checked out Squeeze online and was blown away by how crisp and powerful the act is – it's hard to believe Cool for Cats was released in 1979!

Lieberman estimates 250,000 people visit the Festival annually. He can't put a



Steven Page, ex-member of Barenaked Ladies fame entertains at the 2009 Festival of Friends.

hard number on attendance because the festival is free and Gage Park, the home to the Festival for 35 years, is porous. "People come in at several entry points," says Lieberman. "So the only way estimate is to track how much sewage and garbage we generate and then compare that to the figures generated by paid events." Essentially Lieberman compares porta-potty numbers with other outdoor events that charge admission, and then estimate Festival of Friends attendance based on how much poop the honey wagon carted off. It's a dirty job, but someone has to do it.

One thing Lieberman can track is the

number of people attending from out of the area. He does this by analyzing website traffic, specifically people logging in to "buy" tickets, seek directions and confirm line-ups. By matching that traffic with the spike in hotel stays in the area, Lieberman suggests that 50,000 "tourism destination" travelers attend the Festival. That number has tripled in the past five years, most of it coming from the United States. And Lieberman expects to see a major increase this year. "We've never had our line-up finalized earlier than this. We've never had the website working earlier. We know fans of Buckwheat, Dr. John, Squeeze – the entire

line-up – will be online making plans to get out here."

So, with the Festival growing, and Gage Park, well, not growing, is there a possibility the Festival of Friends could outgrow its venerable home? "It could," admits Lieberman. "We're at a sort of critical mass as it is, and we have big plans for the future of the Festival. It has become a regional event, so one day it might need a larger, 'regional-style' venue. The only things written in stone are that the Festival will always be based in the Hamilton area, and the Festival will always be free. Beyond that, who knows?"

2010 FESTIVAL OF FRIENDS MAINSTAGE LINEUP

Friday, Aug. 6

Noon – T-Rex Cineplex
1:15 – Kim Koren
2:30 –Whale Tooth
3:45 – Harlan Pepper
5 – Stumbleweed
6:30 – Richie Havens

8 – Buckwheat Zydeco
9:30 – Dr. John

Saturday, Aug. 7

Noon Y108 winner
1:15 – 40 Sons
2:30 – Fozzy (with Chris Jericho)

3:45 – Hollowick
5 p.m. – LeE HARVeY OsMOND
6:30 – The Respectables
8 p.m. – Coney Hatch
9:30 – Gord Downie

Sunday, Aug. 8
Noon – Fiddlestix

1:15 – TBA
2:30 – TBA
3:45 – Dr. Draw
5 – The Baretas
6:30 – Flock of Seagulls
8 – Peter Murphy
9:30 – Squeeze

Thie Convery is diving in to make a difference

ROTARIAN TO ATTEMPT LAKE ONTARIO SWIM TO RAISE FUNDS TO FIGHT POLIO

BY KAREN CUMMING
SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER

Thie Convery is a woman who likes to set a goal. Not just any goal. It's usually a big one. And this one is a doozy. The 43 year old financial advisor and Rotarian from Dundas is training to swim Lake Ontario this summer. With every stroke, she'll be raising funds to help end Polio through Rotary International's "End Polio Now" campaign. Impossible? Not if you know Thie Convery. She is confidence personified.

"It might seem like a long, long way to swim, but I know that if I just keep stroking, I'll get there!"

It's called the Swim To End Polio, and it will take this dynamic athlete 52 kilometers from Niagara-on-the-Lake to Toronto on August 6 and 7. What makes it even more remarkable is that Convery has only been training as a long distance swimmer for the last nine months. The idea to attempt the swim came to her one night last summer at the dinner table. "A fellow Rotarian asked me what my next physical goal was going to be. And out of the blue, I said: 'I'm going to swim across Lake Ontario!' And I thought, 'Who just said that?' Then another Rotarian at the table chimed in: 'That's a great idea! If you're going to do that, we might as well raise a little money to end Polio!' And it just took off from there."

This isn't the first time that Convery has set a serious athletic goal for herself. Back in 2004, she decided to train to become a

competitive bodybuilder. With no previous experience in the sport, she won her first competition. Anyone who knows her isn't surprised. She quite literally has what it takes: grit, guts and gumption.

Convery also has some powerful motivation when it comes to the Swim To End Polio – the deep and compelling desire to help end the disease in her lifetime.

"My generation just doesn't know polio because we've all had the vaccine. It's hard for me to comprehend that there are still children getting polio. And that's just not right when we know how to solve that problem!"

Rotary Clubs around the world have been collaborating with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention for almost 30 years now to wipe out Polio. Currently, the disease exists only in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and parts of India. Happily, every penny raised by the swim will be matched by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Convery hopes to raise at least \$150,000, which would immunize some 250,000 children against the dreaded disease.

"A friend said to me, 'Thie, the flower doesn't know the seed.' He meant that I won't know the names of the children who will receive the vaccine due to the efforts of the Swim To End Polio, and they won't know me. But I can see the faces of those children, in the arms of a parent, with mouth open and head tilted back, and another hand about to dispense a drop of the polio vaccine in their mouth. That child won't get polio – and that's more than



Dundas Rotarian Thie Convery is in training for an attempted swim of Lake Ontario

enough to keep me swimming for hours and kilometers on end!"

If you'd like to help make Convery's

dream a reality, you can donate to the Swim To End Polio online at: www.Swim-ToEndPolio.ca.